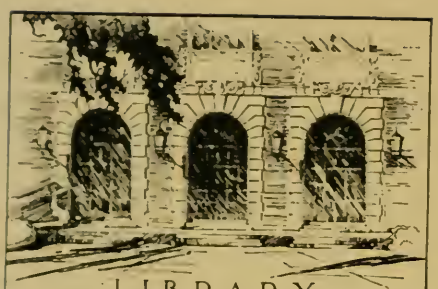

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WHEN I AWAKE.

A SERMON PREACHED IN LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL, MARCH 3, 1895.

BY

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The 3rd of March was the Sunday after the two Funerals—of Lord Aberdare, and of Mrs. Lewis, wife of the Bishop of Llandaff.

WHEN I AWAKE.

Psalm xvii. 15.

I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.

The words are plain enough for plain people. And we are all plain people to-day. In the presence of death Scripture—even Old Testament Scripture—starts once again into plain speech and plain dealing. We read it again as it was written, to be a lamp shining in a dark place till the day dawn and the day-star rise.

Two worlds are ours: one has death in front of it, the other has death behind it: that is the difference between us and our lost ones: I dare not say the only difference, because we know so little and because we speak so ignorantly: but I will say it is the difference which has all other differences in it—and certainly it is the difference which most distinctly divides us to-day.

'When I awake,' the text says. The living man speaks, and therefore death is in front of him. And he calls death an awaking.

And he says that when death is once behind him, when once he is awake, he shall be 'satisfied'—satisfied with something which he calls 'God's likeness.'

It is worth our close attention for a very few minutes this morning, to get into this deep saying if we can—for it certainly concerns all of us.

'When I awake,' says the Psalmist. Are we not all awake—awake already? St. Paul says not, when he says, speaking of this life, 'The night is far spent; the day,' the real day, 'is at hand'—but still future.

It does not commonly seem so to the living. It is a new art and a new science of the Christian man to think it so, and yet not to be depressed and paralyzed by that view of it. 'The men of the world,' as an earlier verse of this Psalm calls them, would be so. It might check enterprise, it might discourage invention, it might introduce a fatal torpor into earth's activities, if men felt this life to be a dream, and yet knew not for certain of any other.

But to the man who can call life night because he sees daylight, sunlight, heaven-light beyond it, it is vigour, it is vitality, to say, 'I sleep, but my soul waketh,' because I foresee a waking

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which shall be life to my whole being. 'I shall be satisfied when I awake.'

Is there anything fanciful, fantastic, fanatical, in saying, 'When I awake,' and meaning, 'When I die?'

I might tell of the many illusions which are the dreams of this life; such as its ideas of its own permanence—houses continuing for ever, lands to be called in perpetuity after their purchasers, or achievements in literature or politics never to be forgotten. Or I might tell of its ideas of satisfaction to be found somewhere in this life—found in wealth, or found in pleasure, or found in work, or found in knowledge, or found at all events in affection.

Or I might leave on one side these commonplaces of the moralist, and carry my question higher. I might ask, which is life, sleep or waking, when we speak of the man as God made him, in His own image, after His own likeness, divinely equipped for two worlds, the world which has death in front of it and the world which has death behind it?

'When I awake'—that is dying. At present, as to my true self—which means, or ought to mean, the man made for knowing, made for communing with, made for living to God—I am but half awake, if I look at my common, average,

every-day life—the life of the twenty-three out of the twenty-four hours of the day, of the fifty-one out of the fifty-two weeks of the year, of the sixty-nine out of the seventy years of the life-time: if I think of these, which make the bulk of my being, I am not awake—no! With a great effort, alas too often a reluctant effort, I drag, I lash, I goad myself to such prayer as is all that I know of communion with the God of my life: I tarry long on the threshold of the presence-chamber: at last the door opens: for one moment I see afar off the King in His beauty: for one moment—afar off: the beatific vision itself, in its full glory, in its abiding impressiveness, is still, still, still 'a little beyond.'

'When I awake'—is that dying? is that the having died? is that the being dead? Then for me death and life shall exchange names: 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake'—which means, when I die—'with Thy likeness.'

And what is this 'likeness?'

On the first hearing we should imagine it to be the communicated likeness. 'I shall be like God.' And the Prayer Book Version so gives it. 'When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.'

And truly the sense thus given has its attractiveness. To be able to anticipate a time (no

further off than the death which may come any day) when this weary, this intolerable round of the daily repenting and daily sinning shall be exchanged for one ever-present 'now' of habitual holiness—when the shameful consciousness of mercies never felt as they ought to be, of duties never done as they ought to be, of graces always imperfect, of sins never more than just kept under, never quite eradicated, shall be replaced by a delightful facility of being good, a secure possession of the indwelling Spirit, an unbroken consciousness in myself of all that is pure and noble and lovely and godlike—this is a prospect worth dying for: if the text means this, we can see from far or from near its beauteous light, we can sigh and long and even faint for its repose.

And yet the Psalmist's sense of the words is not this.

From that world not only boasting, but self itself is shut and barred out. In that world not only boasting, but self-satisfaction, self-complacency, self-contemplation, self-consciousness in its most innocent, most graceful form, will have neither place nor name.

Who shall not rejoice to hear that the likeness which shall satisfy there is not our likeness to God, but God's own likeness to Himself?

The word rendered 'likeness' is more exactly 'shape' or 'form.' And the remarkable thing is that the Invisible God is here spoken of as made visible to those who shall be counted worthy to attain that world.

It is the same word which we find in the 12th chapter of the Book of Numbers, where it is given as the unique privilege of the greatest of men, that with him God 'will speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches, and the *form* of the Lord shall he behold.'

'I shall be satisfied, when I awake,' not with bearing Thy likeness—the likeness of Thy purity or Thy goodness or Thy love—but with seeing Thy form, no longer as in the mirror of a distant reflexion, no longer as in the description of an enigmatical saying, but manifestly, and as though face to face.

It is quite needless, I am sure, to guard the phrase from a literal interpretation, as though it must imply a material shape or a visible embodiment. In Christ indeed, the Son of His love, God did take human form, so that it could be said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' And Christ Himself is said in another place to have been from the beginning in the form of God. But we must remember that God is Spirit—therefore the form, the image, the like-

ness, the countenance, the mouth that speaks, the face that looks, all, all are spiritual.

But now seek to enter into the very thing thought by the holy writer.

'I shall be satisfied, when I awake' from this life of shadow and seeming, 'with Thy form,' with the spiritual sight of Thee as Thou really art. 'We shall see Him as He is.'

Wonderful change! from the not seeing Him at all, from the never being able, whether in the Church or in the chamber, to get one glimpse of Him—and there are souls, doubtless, here in the congregation, always athirst, always hungry, because, with all their gazing, heaven never draws nigh—to the seeing Him as a real, a living, an acting, a loving Person.

Wonderful change! from the seeing Him as He is not, from the mistaking and misapprehending Him, from the seeing Him only as the God of power, or only as the God of judgment, or only as the God of confusion, leaving things double one against another or a thousand against a thousand, all at war, all in chaos, nothing going right, nothing in order, sin and suffering, sin and impunity, sin and the sinner triumphing, sin and the non-sinner crushed—to the seeing Him as the God all and in all, hiding Himself from the living, that He may at last reveal Himself to the dead.

Wonderful change! from the seeing Him in one little part of Him—as a God of kindness, practically overborne by evil—as a God of compassion, hindered and hampered in proving it—as a God of purity, counterworked and counteracted by vice—as a God of patience, tolerant of misery, tolerant of sinning—from the seeing Him (in Scripture phrase) 'in sundry parts and in divers manners' unreconciled and irreconcilable—to the seeing Him in one and on the whole, as the only wise, the only great, and the only good.

Wonderful change! from the always doubting, from the never being quite sure, from the shameful misgiving, never quite banished, that perhaps there may be nothing in religion, nothing true, nothing to bear the whole weight, nothing to carry me through death and judgment into the invisible, into the eternal—to the sight of the 'form,' the essential being, of the All-true, the All-holy, the All-loving.

Wonderful change! from the always changing, from the 'never continuing in one stay,' from the fleeting pleasures, from the flagging energies, from the fickle affections, of the sleeping, dreaming, dying life that is now—to the ever new yet ever old fulness of joy that is in God's presence, 'pleasures for evermore' the Psalmist

calls them—and something of all these transitions lies in the phrase, 'I shall be satisfied with His form'—this is greater and better than being satisfied with bearing or reproducing His likeness—were it only because the greater contains the less in it—'We know that we shall *be* like Him, for we shall *see* Him as He is.'

Satisfied, when we awake, with the sight of Him. But then we must have been unsatisfied first. We must have craved and yearned and sought now, if we would be satisfied then. If, like 'the men of the world' in this Psalm, we have had our good things here, then is the witness gone out of us to any better world beyond: then were it nothing incredible, nothing inexplicable, if this world and we had perished together. It is upon 'the dead in Christ' that St. Paul founds his clenching argument for the Resurrection—If the resurrection were not, 'then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.'

Patience therefore, friends and brethren—that patience which is not indolence, not the waiting for something which time or chance may have in it, but the waiting which is submission, the waiting which is activity, the waiting which is at once upward and onward, the waiting which is faith. 'My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear

before God?' It is in answer to that soul's questioning that the assurance comes, 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.

I must not end without trying in briefest words to utter the two thoughts which are in all our hearts to-day.

The two thoughts are two deaths. Very unlike each other in many ways, the death of Sunday's dawn and the death of Monday's sunset: unlike in many things, alike in some things: alike, we trust, in one thing—that each was a sleep and each was an awaking.

A great man is fallen in our Israel—the Israel of our England, and the Israel of our Wales. A man of many interests and many activities: a patriot, not in the poor vulgar sense, of talk and bluster, of profession or sentiment, of politics or party, but in all the elevation of honest thought and unselfish aim and devoted service: a man of work, not of theory—of doing, not of dreaming. Like the great lawgiver, he went forth, early in life, to look upon the burdens, social, mental, moral, of his countrymen—to weigh and to measure and to ponder and to estimate, and then to give his life to bearing and so to lightening them.

His country accepted his devotion, and now that in ripe age he rests from his labours, misses him, and mourns him, and will not let him die.

And one tenderer thought still mingles with our sorrow over the grave of the patriot.

Jesus Christ upon earth wrote but one epitaph: it was very brief, very simple, yet it goes everywhere (as He said it would) with the Gospel—'She hath done what she could.' It is the estimate of a life complete and beautiful in the sight of God: the life of a woman, not conspicuous for gifts or powers: a life lived at home, in unselfish kindnesses, in unambitious duties. Enough for her if it could be the centre of comfort and help to a village: enough if the heart of a loved and honoured husband could trust her, and rest himself in her presence from the cares and toils of the long ministerial day.

'In her tongue was the law of kindness'—what, in comparison with this, would have been the memory now of cleverness or of brilliancy, of social triumphs, or heroic benevolences?

'She hath done what she could.' To her was assigned that most wholesome, most modest, most womanly of offices, unknown in some lands, prohibited (strange to say) by some Churches—the office of comforting the life, of helping the work, of doubling the influence of one of the

Church's pastors—our Church's chief pastor—for whose now desolate home, and lonely life, and more than ever difficult labour, it is my office, in naked yet heartfelt simplicity, to bespeak the aid of your sympathy, your affection, your prayers, to-day, and day by day ever hereafter, till he too shall awake to see God.